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ATTITUDE TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

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Whenever the Karens have had an opportunity they have shown their loyalty to the British Government. They have a deep sense of gratitude for the security that has come with a settled and orderly government. This has allowed them to emerge from their hilly recesses, clear tracts of land on the more fertile plains, and build villages of more permanent construction than the flimsy bamboo structures that they built in the mountains when they had to move every two years. Here they could raise buffaloes and cattle and have reasonable protection against forays and marauders. Open exploitation by the Burmese was curbed if not entirely stopped.

During the first Burmese War in 1826 they served as guides for the English expedition against Ava and were commended for their good faith by Major Snodgrass in his "Narrative of the Burmese War". After the war they turned to the American missionaries for education, but they were forbidden to have any contact with the foreigners because the Burmese king and his Government feared the influence of intruders. They were prohibited from visiting their teachers even as late as 1851, when the Burmese Viceroy in Rangoon threatened to shoot instantly the first Karen he should find capable of reading.

In the Second Burmese War in 1852 they led the attacking forces of the British through jungle paths up to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, which was then the strongest military citadel near Rangoon, to attack it successfully from the rear.

The Burmese knew the desire of the Karens for

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freedom which would come from a change in Government, and they inflicted cruel vengeance upon them, burning their villages within a fifty mile radius of Rangoon, and putting men, women and children to death in barbarous ways. This caused large migrations from the territory under the Burmese king to Tenasserim and Arakan which were under British rule. Even here there were frequent miscarriages of justice, for they had to contend against subordinate Burmese officers who still tried to prevent them from gaining more prestige.

After the Third Burmese War in 1885 Karen levies were raised to assist the British. They did excellent work in the pacification of the country where former Burmese soldiers roamed and robbed at will. For assistance in putting down this terror the Karens received scant reward. In fact, many Karens, who with Government permission and their own money had purchased guns for the defence of the country, had them forcibly confiscated because of the unfounded suspicion of their scheming neighbours who resented their rising recognition.

During World War I many Karens were enrolled in the armed services and proved themselves capable and loyal wherever they were called to serve, whether in Mesopotamia, Egypt, or for guard duty in India and the Malay States.

During the Burmese Rebellion under "Saya San" in 1930, in the Tharrawaddy District, the Karens made valuable contributions to the putting down of the insurrection and many of them received honours for their good work at the Durbar in Rangoon. When Karens can serve under officers of their own people they are most happy. They have confidence in British officers but

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often find it difficult to serve under Burman or Indian officers.

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During the rise of the nationalistic movements in Burma, the Karens naturally looked forward to being ruled by their old adversaries without much enthusiasm. They entered into the new government however and played their part as well as could be expected considering their limited opportunity ; by so doing they won the respect of their neighbours to a certain degree and made a contribution to the new regime. In the Cabinets formed under the constitution in force since 1935 there was usually a Karen member who held a portfolio.

As a rule the Karens have exhibited true loyalty to the British Government, but that does not preclude the presence of a few ambitious men who for personal gain have taken the part of Quislings in the present war. Although they happened to be in rather important positions they had only a small following, mostly of ignorant and self-seeking people, and were entirely in opposition to the general attitude of the Karens throughout the country.

In World War II the work of the Karens has been most evident. They occupy important positions in the army and in other services and have done excellent work. If we can believe rumours that have come from Burma, they are undergoing a great deal of suffering not only from the Japanese but from the large number of 'bad hats' who even in peaceful times are always ready to seize an opportunity of easy loot.

The position of minorities has always been difficult. The lot of the Karens has not been harder than that of many other small groups who have had different charac-

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CHAPTER XVI

WARFARE AND WEAPONS

Private Forays

628 787 701 Two or three generations have elapsed since the Karen in Lower Burma indulged in their old-time warfare, which consisted of forays secretly organized and carefully executed against their enemies. In the Toungoo Hills and in Karenni these raids have been suppressed only in recent years, as the regions named have been brought more fully under British rule. The people used to call such expeditions "ta hseh hsu ma beu," which means a strong and concealed thrust. A foray was undertaken by an individual to avenge a personal wrong committed by an inhabitant of another village. It was a recognized method of settling a grievance, like the sheriff's execution of the judgment obtained in a suit at law in a more civilized community. The conflict was not one between village and village, but between personal enemies. The man who inaugurated the foray set up his spear in the open space of his village and marked a white line half-way up on the spear shaft. Those who were ready to go on the expedition and renounce the right of their families to an indemnity in case they were killed, placed their marks above the half-way line, while those willing to join without making this renunciation added their marks below it. Of course, the chicken bones had to be consulted both as to the feasibility of the raid and a favorable time for it.

726 789 When this time had arrived, the organizer of the foray killed a hog or a fowl; took a bit of the heart, liver, and entrails; minced them together; added a little salt, and wrapped the mixture in a leaf. This talisman was then entrusted to two spies, who were to carry it to the village where the foe dwelt. They were admonished to note whether or not any spikes were planted along the paths leading to the place, the best means of access thereto, and the precise location and general arrangement of the village. Finally, they were to visit with the inhabitants there and find an opportunity of dropping the contents of their leaf into the food of their hosts. If they succeeded in this last stratagem, they were supposed to

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good order. At length the Karen National Association ("Daw k' lu," meaning literally "the whole race") was organized. All the districts in which the Karen live were represented at its first meet-

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Rev. Thra' Maung Yin, of Bassein
He held the rank of honorary havildar in the Karen battalion of the Burma Rifles, 1917-1920, and was most highly commended by his commanding officers for his wholesome influence as a religious teacher.

ing, a few non-Christians attending, although the leaders were Christians. The aim of the association was simply to promote the economic and educational interests of the people, as well as to plan for their representation at public functions, such as on the occasion of viceregal visits. Funds have been raised for these purposes, but,

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668 177 unfortunately, through mismanagement, have not proved to be permanent. During the World War the association served as a mouthpiece for the expression of the loyalty of the race and did some active work in recruiting. It furthered the sending of deputations to meet the Montague Commission and later sent a rather ill-advised delegation to England to promote the national interests, which have been so much emphasized as a result of the world conflict.

668 The military activities of the Karen have been largely confined in the past to village raids. There have been times when there was a prospect that a real leader might arise to unite a large group of villages into a kind of state and carry on warfare on a large scale. One such attempt was made by a Karen, of Martaban or Shwegyin, who assumed the Burmese title of "Nün Laung" or Coming Prince—a favorite title with rebellious members of the Burmese court who tried to ursurp the throne. This adventurer organized a religio-political movement among his compatriots throughout the region from Siam to Bassein. They expected him to fulfil a prophecy to the effect that the Karen would drive out the foreigners and establish a new dynasty at Pegu. However, this rebellion was soon put down and its leaders were driven into Karenni, where they disappeared.[9]

● 701 The Karen levies, which did so much to re-establish peace throughout the province of Burma after the Third Burmese War, and, for the most part under their missionaries as officers and with but little military organization, captured some of the dacoit leaders after scattering their followers, rendered a service deserving of more credit than it received at the time. Local and racial feeling was still running too high, and official circles did not always understand the situation fully.[10]

Soon after these services, which were rendered by most of the Karens gratuitously and with arms which they had paid for, malicious rumors were circulated that these men were of doubtful loyalty. The result was that they were divested of their arms and given no compensation whatever. It still remained true, however, that they had saved their homes, protected the honor of their

[9] *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, p. 488; *Imperial Gazetteer, Burma*, Vol. I, p. 338; Lieut. Gen. A. Fytche, C. S. I., *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, quoted in an article entitled "The Karens" in the *Rangoon Gazette* of June 6, 1917.

[10] For an account of the capture of Bo Hline, the notorious dacoit, in Tounguo, see the closing chapters of Cumming's *In the Shadow of the Pagoda*. These chapters are quoted in Dr. Bunker's *Saw Tha*, pp. 348-376. The murderers of Mr. Barbe, the deputy commissioner of Bassein, were apprehended by the Karen levy in that district.

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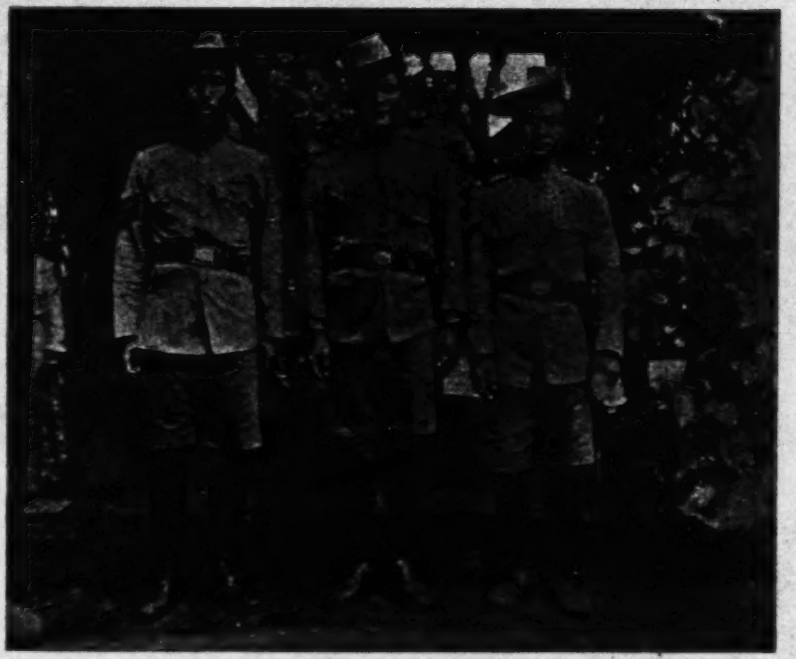
wives and daughters, and rendered an important service to the Government, the fruits of which have not yet disappeared. After all their long suffering and patient endurance this experience was a hard one, to which they should not have been subjected.[11]



KAREN MILITARY POLICE
These men were a part of a squad who shot some notorious dacoits in the Insein District, 1917. They are all from Toungoo District.

Meantime, a battalion of the Karen Military Police had been organized and was rendering service to the Government. It remained a separate unit until 1899. At that time an unfortunate affair, in which liquor played a prominent part, resulted in the dispersion of the battalion, the companies that were retained being sent into different sections of the province. These surviving companies have not failed to give a good account of themselves, for example, in scattering within the last few years the dacoits in the Okkan region of the Insein district and also in the Bassein district.

[11] This statement is based on correspondence between members of the American Baptist Mission and the Secretary to the Government carried on at the time.

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701 At the outbreak of the World War in 1914 the loyalty of the Karen people manifested itself in the large number of applications to enter military service in defense of the Empire. Some of the applications were made through the author. None was accepted at the time, for the Government had not yet adopted the policy of recruiting in Burma. Later, when this was done, the response on the part of the Karens was not equaled by that of any of the neighboring races. However, the number of Karens taken into the service was limited. In the Burma Rifles, the one regiment recruited in the province, of a total of sixteen companies three were Karen; one, Shan; one, Arracanese, and the others, Burmese. Karens were in all the other regiments in about the same proportion.[12] In the Sappers and Miners, the first unit to leave the country for duty abroad, the highest native officer was a Karen. There was also a small group of Karens in the company which did itself credit in Mesopotamia. An officer of that company told me that other officers, in calling for detachments, often asked that Karens might be sent. In one Karen company so many of the men were detailed for instruction service in other companies that regular drill was much interfered with. These incidents suggest that the enlisted men among the Karens were rendering an honorable and appreciated service in the war.

100 Should one inquire as to the future of the Karen people, my answer would be that not as a separate people, living apart and seeking special advantages for themselves, will they make the most progress; but, forgetting racial feeling as far as possible and throwing themselves into the life of the land in which they find themselves and adding their quota to the general good, they will not only raise themselves, but also the level of the common life which they must share with their neighbors. In this way they will truly find themselves and contribute to the growth and progress of a country that is capable of untold advancement.

[12] The following statement is taken from a letter of Feb. 16, 1919, from the officer in charge of recruiting at Meiktila: "In all other units Burmans and Karens are mixed up together, but probably the proportion would be about the same as in the Burma Rifles. There are also Karens in the Military Police."